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SUBJECT: ST. LUCIAN ELECTIONS: THE WHO, THE HOW, AND THE
WHAT'S NEXT

REF: BRIDGETOWN 2180

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Sir John Compton was sworn in as Prime Minister of St. Lucia on December 15 after his United Workers Party (UWP) defeated the ruling St. Lucia Labor Party (SLP) in December 11 elections. Leonard "Spider" Montoute has been selected to become Deputy PM. Reasons for opposition UWP victory include mismanagement and cost overruns in government projects and an unexpected increase in the numbers of voters turning out to support change in the form of the opposition. PM Compton's cabinet, to be officially announced and sworn in on December 19, will likely feature several inexperienced, first-time public servants. UWP priorities include campaign finance reform, revising the new labor code, and revitalizing agriculture. It also seems likely that UWP will distance itself from PetroCaribe and other Venezuelan initiatives. END SUMMARY.

THE PLAYERS: A SPIDER AND SOME NEWCOMERS

12. (SBU) On December 15, veteran politician Sir John Compton was sworn in as Prime Minister of St. Lucia following the official ballot count and certification of results. Leonard "Spider" Montoute was given the role of Deputy Prime Minister. Montoute is a former athlete, educator, and community servant who has emerged as an astute politician. In his first attempt at running for office in 2001, Montoute only lost by 273 votes against then Deputy PM Mario Michel. In the December 11 election, he convincingly defeated former UN Ambassador Julian Hunte by 1,024 votes. During the 2006 campaign, Montoute served as deputy UWP leader, becoming Compton's right-hand man. He studied both in Germany and the United States, earning a degree in Sports Medicine at New Jersey's Kean University.

13. (SBU) The new cabinet is scheduled to be sworn in on December 19, and current projections show only two previous cabinet members and four previous members of parliament. Although changes may occur in the interim, current plans are for PM Compton to handle the Finance and Physical Planning portfolios, Rufus Bousquet to become either Foreign Minister or Tourism Minister, and Keith Mondesir to assume the job of Minister of National Security and Home Affairs. An Attorney General is still to be determined. Post will report the final cabinet appointments after they are made official.

¶4. (C) Although Central Castries victor Richard Frederick was not appointed Deputy PM as many expected, he is currently slated to take the position of Minister of Housing, Urban Renewal, and Local Governance. More on Frederick's background and intra-party maneuvering will be reported septel.

THE VICTORY: HOW UWP WON

¶5. (U) A narrow ruling party victory with a stronger opposition had been the general prediction by observers, political scientists, and the general public going into the elections. The St. Lucia Labour Party (SLP) was favored in three reputable polls, two by Jamaica's Bill Johnson and one by Barbados-based Peter Wickham (reftel). It was also estimated that the SLP spent two times as much on advertising as the UWP did. After the UWP upset, many commented that the UWP won because the SLP shot itself in the foot.

¶6. (C) Montoute summarized for PolOff the reasons for the UWP victory. According to Deputy PM-select, the SLP government got arrogant, mismanaging a number of projects and then not explaining its actions to satisfaction of the public. As an example, Montoute cited the manager of the National Conservation Authority (NCA) who used NCA-paid workers to staff his private restaurants. He also pointed to the many cost overruns in public projects, such as various road construction projects in preparation for Cricket World Cup. In addition to mismanagement and cost overruns, Montoute claimed that the voters were tired of the deteriorating security situation in St. Lucia and the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth. Montoute's comments parallel the general sentiment of voters with whom PolOff spoke.

¶7. (U) Another important factor in the opposition victory was the increased number of voters who came out to support the UWP. The SLP not only retained its votes from the 2001 election, but actually gained votes: 34,142 votes in 2001 and 35,830 votes in 2006. However, the UWP garnered a whopping 15,000 more votes in 2006: from 23,095 votes in 2001 to 38,212 in 2006. This same dynamic was reflected in individual races. For example, popular SLP minister Felix Finisterre received 2,333 votes in 2001 and 2,510 in 2006, but lost his seat because the turnout of opposition voters gave his opponent even more votes. Journalist Rick Wayne reflected on television that many voters intended to vote UWP to strengthen the opposition, but so many did so that the opposition triumphed.

¶8. (U) Other factors working against the SLP campaign include the laying off of over 100 employees at the Sandals resort in November and the ensuing protest at Sandals' gates, two murders less than a week before the election, and an increase in traffic congestion due to road construction the week prior to the election. Also, Wickham observed in an interview that publishing Johnson's poll results two days before the election actually hurt the SLP by making party supporters complacent about what seemed to be an impending victory.

THE PLAN: FIRST UNDERTAKINGS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

¶9. (C) Prior to and immediately following the elections, PM Compton made it clear that he will make campaign finance reform one of his first priorities. In a private conversation, Montoute informed PolOff that, on December 14, PM Compton again raised this plan in a party meeting, stating that he was happy that former PM Kenny Anthony had accused the UWP campaign of accepting drug money because he can now point to opposition members and say they have to support the reform legislation because of their dissatisfaction with the campaign's funding.

¶10. (C) Montoute also confirmed that two items of the former government's unfinished business will likely be reversed. First, according to Montoute, Compton has already declared that the new Labour Code, which was passed on November 13 but

has yet to be promulgated, will "go back to the drafters" for revisions. Second, when asked about Petrocaribe, which St. Lucia has not yet officially signed, Montoute predicted that St. Lucia "will not be part of Chavez's game." Montoute characterized Hugo Chavez as the next Fidel Castro, noting that St. Lucia "is not interested in Chavez's personal ego, but only interested in its national development."

¶11. (U) Future priorities for the new UWP government also include decreasing crime by increasing youth training programs and introducing wider agricultural diversification. Revitalizing the agricultural sector is one of the chief priorities for the government.

COMMENT: THINGS NOT AS EASY AS THEY SEEM

¶12. (SBU) Although the clear-cut opposition victory surprised many St. Lucians as well as outside observers, in many respects the new government still faces an uphill battle. For example, the 11-6 win came with only 51.6 per cent of the popular vote. Also, the UWP is bringing in a relatively inexperienced team to enact and implement its policies. Of the 11 parliamentary victors, five have never held public office (Montoute, Estephane, Ezekial Joseph, Guy Joseph, and Mondesir), and three (Estephane, E.Joseph, and G.Joseph) were contesting an election for the first time.

¶13. (C) In terms of foreign policy, the new government's aversion to pro-Cuba and pro-Venezuela policies typical of Eastern Caribbean governments will prove a welcome change. However, the new St. Lucia government presents a potential headache to the United States as well: the ambitious and popular attorney Richard Frederick, a prominent newcomer thought to have ties to drug traffickers and other criminal elements, reportedly financed many of his UWP colleagues campaigns. Post will report on the installation of the UWP cabinet and Frederick's new role septel.

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